

# DATA METHODOLOGY



## ● FOOD STAMP PROGRAM

CFPA is able to estimate the number of individuals that participate in the Food Stamp Program from the Health and Welfare Agency. However, we are not able to obtain data on the number of Californians that are actually eligible because of the complicated system of determining eligibility for benefits. Households are eligible based on a number of factors, including income, immigration status, drug felon status, assets, and car ownership. This makes it difficult to discern the universe of eligible individuals from the number participating to understand program underutilization.

Currently, CFPA is adopting a methodology of using the 100% FPL to estimate the number of individuals eligible for the Food Stamp Program. Comparing this to the number of participants will show an estimate of the number of individuals who are eligible for food stamps, but are not receiving their benefits. This provides a quantitative estimate of underutilization in the Food Stamp Program.

Using the 100% FPL provides a sort of check-and-balance. It is possible that some households living *above* the poverty level would qualify for food stamp benefits, which means that using 100% FPL would underestimate how many are eligible for the program. (This explains why some data show that there are more people receiving food stamps than there are poor.) On the flip side, it is possible that a family living *below* poverty level would not qualify for food stamps based on their assets. (Food stamp eligibility standards include a resource test, can disqualify families with assets over \$2,000, and a vehicle asset test, can disqualify families who own a car valued above \$4,650.) So, using the 100% FPL overestimates the number of those eligible for the program in this regard.

Comparing the number of people living in poverty to the number of Food Stamp Program recipients may not fully account for how many eligible individuals are potentially un-served by the program. Yet, using the number of poor to estimate how well the program reaches those in need is still a good measure. Other states, such as Texas, have been using this methodology with close quantitative measures of accuracy and very little controversy. (CFPA does have a statewide participation number of 45%, but counties differ considerably in their participation numbers, largely in part to outreach efforts. So, applying one number to all 58 counties may have less accuracy.)